

# **EXHIBIT B**

Talkhouse

Primary Menu



# In Praise of Late Woody: The Woody Allen Fan Club is a Lonely Place to Be

With the controversial New York director's critical reputation at an all-time low, Chadd Harbold speaks strongly in defense of his later work.

By [Chadd Harbold](#) | August 29, 2016



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CHADD HARBOLD

WOODY ALLEN

*The following is one of two Talkhouse pieces published today about the late-career films of Woody Allen. You can read Matthew Wilder's piece [here](#).*

When I was a kid, growing up in Ohio, New York City was synonymous with the movies. It was not Central Park, Rockefeller Center and Times Square. It was *Taxi Driver*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *The French Connection*, *All That Jazz*, *Bad Lieutenant*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *The Godfather*, *Kids*, *Klute*, *Stranger Than Paradise*, *Requiem for a Dream*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Little Murders*, *Shadows* and *Annie Hall*. And, well, Woody Allen in general.

When I finally moved to New York City in 2005, the *Match Point* trailer was playing to regular laughs at the reveal that this erotic, serious thriller was directed by Woody Allen. When the film came out, it prompted dozens of articles about Woody's comeback. After spending much of the '90s on a relative downslide, and the early 2000s making the worst films he would ever make, most everyone was happy to see that he was back at the top of his game. Until the next year, when he wasn't.

I didn't see *Scoop* in theaters (no one did), but the general feeling seemed to be that Woody was no longer "back." Like another New York institution that airs live on Saturday nights, people always seem to think Woody Allen's films were better back in the day. This has been such a consistent criticism of his work that he parroted it in *Stardust Memories*, where aliens tell his character that they miss the "early, funny ones." That was in 1980. I eventually did see *Scoop* on DVD (it's as bad as you've heard), so the first Woody film I saw in a theater in New York City was *Cassandra's Dream* (which is not). And so it went – every summer a new Woody Allen film, every summer a new cultural appreciation or dismissal of the film, and of him.

Today, the Woody Allen fan club is a lonely place to be. A few months after the release of *Blue Jasmine*, probably his late-career masterpiece, allegations from the early 1990s resurfaced about Woody Allen and his adopted daughter, Dylan Farrow. Many people, including several of my friends, were no longer interested in seeing his films – certainly not the new ones, but not the old ones either. Speaking for myself, I'm not particularly concerned about an artist's personal life. Their behavior doesn't seem relevant to me when it comes to enjoying their work; if we threw out the work of every artist who was personally reprehensible in some way, there wouldn't be much art left. I don't know exactly what Woody Allen did or didn't do, but for me, there is nothing he could do that could prevent *Hannah and Her Sisters* from being a great movie. Would I want to be friends with Woody Allen? No – but I still want to watch his movies.

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Perhaps because of Woody Allen's past – even before the allegations resurfaced, people were certainly troubled by his relationship with Mia

Farrow's adopted daughter, and his now-wife of 19 years, Soon-Yi Previn – the critical appraisal surrounding Woody's later period seems almost arbitrary, even schizophrenic. I never understood, for example, why *Match Point* (which retreads the territory of *Crimes and Misdemeanors*) was considered a great film, while *Cassandra's Dream* and *Irrational Man* (which do the same) were deemed garbage. I came out of *Cassandra* thinking it was the best of his British films – certainly the messiest, most interesting one, with a morally ambiguous center that I still find myself thinking about.

There has been a supposed decline in Allen's work recently, but it's tough to argue with the quality of the films he's made in this latter period of his career. *Vicky Christina Barcelona* reminded us all how he writes brilliantly for women – though recently this only tends to be true when those women are the protagonists. *Midnight in Paris* managed to be both sweet and profound, as well as, of course, extremely funny – and became the highest grossing film of Allen's career. It's always funny to me that whenever Woody has made a film in this period that was largely admired, everyone seems to forget that after the previous film they had written him off for good. Another masterpiece, *Blue Jasmine*, contains the best performance in a Woody film since Sean Penn in *Sweet and Lowdown*. The film's depiction of its protagonist's slow descent into madness is heartbreakingly tragic, and Cate Blanchett's Oscar for performance as the title character was richly deserved.

Perhaps it was the reemergence of the allegations against Allen that caused the dismissal of *Irrational Man*, but I never understood why people didn't like it. Joaquin Phoenix is probably the best Woody surrogate since Kenneth Branagh in *Celebrity*, and it is one of his darkest and most nihilistic films – and that's saying something. It also contains a very rare (for him) scene of physical violence. It is an angry, bitter film. I am hesitant to suggest a connection between the film's tone and Allen's personal life at the time (as he's been so forceful in denying it), but the resonance certainly feels significant.

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*Café Society*, Allen's new movie, begins light and breezy, an enjoyable romp through the 1930s Hollywood and New York. Jesse Eisenberg feels right at home as the protagonist (it feels as if he could have been Woody's

go-to lead for years) and Kristen Stewart is warm and charming, which makes her transition later in the film so devastating. As it has been noted elsewhere, the film feels much longer than its scant 96-minute running time, not because it's boring, but because it covers so much ground and time. It fails to reach the heights of some recent Allen films, but it is not slight either. It feels like a gear-up for another masterpiece. *Café Society*'s ending is not nihilistic or dark, but deeply ambivalent and unresolved. It belies any notion of an *ending* – life goes on, and all that. I think it's his best ending since, well, the last one.

In going through Allen's most recent 12 films, which comprise his "late period," I would say three are bad (*Scoop*, *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, *To Rome with Love*), three are merely good (*Cassandra's Dream*, *Whatever Works*, *Magic in the Moonlight*), four are excellent (*Match Point*, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *Irrational Man*, *Café Society*) and two are masterpieces (*Midnight in Paris* and *Blue Jasmine*). Does a track record get much better than that? Why exactly is this guy supposedly a has-been?

Granted, the quality isn't as consistent as it was in his most creatively fertile period, the 15 years between *Annie Hall* and *Husbands and Wives*, but barely any director can claim to have had a better run than that *ever*. If you don't care about his films anymore, or dismiss them for personal reasons, of course that is up to you. But claiming Allen has lost it, or doesn't care anymore, or should retire, doesn't gel with the track record of the movies. I'll take a minor Woody Allen film over most of what gets released nowadays. Hell, *Irrational Man* was better than any of the movies nominated for Best Picture last year (except *Mad Max: Fury Road*, of course).

With *Café Society* still in theaters, his first television show (!) *Crisis in Six Scenes* about to hit Amazon, and a new film starring Kate Winslet in prep, Woody Allen's work will be a vital part of the cultural conversation for the foreseeable future. Especially while his casting is still so interesting (working with everyone from Miley Cyrus to Elaine May to Andrew Dice Clay) and he consistently works with the best D.P.s in the world, from Vittorio Storaro to Darius Khondji and Javier Aguirresarobe. And I for one will always be there on opening day to see what he has in store next. 



